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ABSTRACT

This lesson is intended to be incorporated into an Art I unit on religicus art that introduces the rise of Christianity as a guiding force in Western art. The goal of the lesson is to compare and contrast the artistic representation of the Virgin Mary most commonly seen in Soria, Spain, with that image most commonly viewed in Mexico. A slide show of the participant's experiences in Mexico accompanies this discussion with many art examples displayed. Background information is provided, along with strategies for puppet shows and other student work. (EH)

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FULBRIGHT-HAYS PROJECT 1997

PRESENTED BY
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INTENTION OF THE LESSON

This lesson is intended to be incorporated into an Art I unit on religious art which introduces the rise of Christianity as a guiding force in Western art. It will be based on my nineteen ninety-six, six week National Endowment for the Humanities work in Soria, Spain, and my observations while participating in the nineteen ninety-seven Fulbright-Hays Seminar in Mexico along with the noted sources. The goal of the lesson will be to compare and contrast the artistic representation of the Virgin Mary most commonly seen in Soria, Spain, with that most commonly viewed in Mexico.

I am very grateful to the Fulbright-Hays organization for making it possible for me to travel and observe first hand the power of art in the lives of the people of Mexico; which in turn, made this information available to my students and the citizens of the small rural ranching community where I live and work and where the importance and the power of art is not always understood nor appreciated!

Muy agradecida,

Patricia A. R. Smith

Patricia A. R. Smith

BACKGROUND INFORMATION
TO BE READ AND DISCUSSED
BEFORE PAINTING

(A slide show of the Fulbright Summer in Mexico will accompany this discussion and many art examples will be displayed at the same time.)

INTRODUCTION

The latter part of the second century marked the beginning of rapid decline in the Eastern Roman Empire. In spite of capable rulers, the devastating invasions of the fifth century finally brought the collapse of Rome's political structure in the East. The Christian church was born as a new source of power to fill the vacuum left by the empire's decline. The position of the Roman emperors was taken by popes. In the East, the Church's role eventually spread to touch every aspect of life. Nowhere was this more evident than in the visual arts (Mittler, p. 287). The Virgin Mary was one of the most common subjects of this Christian art. Her image moves the spectator by the deep feeling of love that she represents. In all the great variety of human feelings, those connected with motherhood are probably the most intense, for they connect not only with the inner but the physical life of mankind. We will now compare and contrast the manner in which her image is represented in Soria, Spain, with that of Mexico.

THE SPANISH IMAGE OF THE VIRGIN

The early Christian artists associated with the Eastern Roman Empire painted the Virgin Mary seated holding the Christ Child (Figure 1). The image depicts the mutual gestures of love and kindness between the Mother of God and the Babe and therefore is referred to as "Lovingkindness". According to tradition, this style of icon was painted by the holy Evangelist Luke during the Mother of God's life. Seeing the icon, she repeated her prophecy, "All generations shall call me blessed and with this image is my grace and power"(Ouspensky, p. 96). Brought to Spain through the work of the church and as a result of early trade, this style of representation is often seen in the small villages around Soria, Spain. Her image seems to be limited to a religious orientation and does not appear to play a significant role outside of the church in this area. One notices that the figure of God as a child seems to be devoid of physical volume and weight. The Mother 's disproportionally small hands do not grip, but merely touch the Christ Child who is gently embracing her. Everything is centered on the faces of the Mother and Child that are devoid of emotion. The Mother's dark eyes full of sweet sorrow, gaze into the distance and at the same time are turned inward into her own depth. The illuminated sorrowful face of the Mother of God is calmly bent towards her Son. He is pressing His face to her check as if to answer her sorrow by blessing her and the world. The smooth flowing rhythm of angular lines creates a mood of calm concentration and a simple scale of blues, browns and ochres is used and the shapes are outlined in black. Gold leaf surrounds the image. The gold was used to add a supernatural glow to the scene, and makes it seem heavenly rather than worldly. One of the distinctive features of the icons of "Lovingkindness" is that only the upper parts of the Divine Mother and Child are depicted.

FIGURE 1

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THE MEXICAN IMAGE OF THE VIRGIN

The Spanish white Virgin of Guadalupe arrived from Extremadura, Spain, with Cortes. The Spaniards placed a statue of Cortes' Virgin Mary in the Indian shrine in the hills north of Mexico City in hopes that the Indians would cease to worship the pagan goddess, Tonantzin (Our Mother) and accept their Virgin. This move was not successful and attendance to the site was slight. Then came the miraculous appearance of the Virgin with her dark complexion and compassion for the poor and the humble. The story states that the Virgin appeared to an Indian, Juan Diego, in December 1531. In a series of appearances to him, she stated her desire to have a church built upon the site of her appearance, the hill of Tepeyac, just outside the Mexican capital. Her wish was fulfilled when Juan Diego presented his cloak full of roses that she had given him for the unbelieving bishop. On the cloak also appeared miraculously the Virgin's image. According to skeptics the Virgin of Guadalupe as she was named, had not miraculously appeared especially for the Mexican people in 1531 as reported, but rather had been painted in the middle of the sixteenth century. Through it the church was trying to create a powerful symbol that would anchor the hold of Christianity on the people of Mexico. Although the origins of her image are shrouded in myth and legend, it is undeniable that she plays a powerful role in the lives of all Mexicans. Countlessly, everyday, Guadalupe is on the lips and in the thoughts of all people of Mexico: the peak of society, the clergy, and the poorest. City and village, mountain and plain, north, south, and center, all turn to her intensely. Her ballads are added by thousands; her shrines can never be numbered. She rides printed on cards in taxis, fastened to the sombrero-crowns. She smiles behind glass in salons, painted on tin in kitchens, carved into cradle-boards. She is presented in plaster, marble, stone, clay baked in cakes and candy, beaded and embroidered on cloth and cut from tissue paper. Her image is found everywhere in Mexico. Since the seventeenth century , the Virgin of Guadalupe has been the powerful central figure in all swings of Mexican history (Krauze, p. 723). Mexicans might argue about the "Father of the Patria" but there is no discussion as to who is the mother of every Mexican, whether Liberal or Conservative. It is Guadalupe's Mexico that one sees as the real nation; and Juan Diego is it self-portrait. He, the poor, sad, humble Indian, emotionally represents the basis of native spiritual, daily assurance. He is a picture of a reason for living. The Virgin is the basis of the fundamental Mexican unity. Tepeyac, the location of her shrine on the edge of the Mexico City, is more than the religious focus of pre-Hispanic day; it is the Mexican nation! The Virgin of Guadalupe continues to be Mexico's supreme expression of popular religiosity. Yearly, on the twelfth of December as much of the nation as can, visits Guadalupe at the Basilica de Guadalupe. "The roads are dust by day and fire by night as the people come from all over Mexico to pray to her, drink from her holy well and eat little maize-cakes called gorditas de Guadalupe in the patios of the basilica while the people serenade the Madonna with the song Mananitas" (Brenner, p. 153).

FIGURE 2

It is the image of the Virgin that miraculously appeared on the cloak of the poor Indian, Juan Diego, that forms the basis for subsequent reproductions of her. See figure 2. Mary is represented as almost life-sized and Indian in appearance, with hands together in a prayerful attitude and lowered eyes. She is completely surrounded by a halo of gold colored rays and stands on a crescent moon supported by a cherub. Members of both the Mexican and American Catholic clergy interpret Mary standing on the moon as the triumph of Christianity over New World pagan beliefs. However, since this aspect of the Virgin existed in Europe long before it arrived in Mexico, the symbol would have to refer to Mary's powers over paganism in the Old World as well. In pre-Christian Mexico, the moon was an Indian emblem for Metzli, goddess of agriculture; thus Mary's association with the moon also can be seen as one of the many transfers of pagan beliefs to Catholicism. Generally the moon signifies her virginity, but specifically it refers to the Woman of the Apocalypse: "And there appeared a great wonder in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, upon her head a crown of twelve stars" (Revelation 12:1). This Apocalyptic Woman was interpreted as representing the Virgin as she existed before the beginning of time. The praying Madonna of Mexico, standing on the moon and encircled by a large halo was developed from medieval illustrations of the Apocalyptic Woman and can be traced back to the tenth and eleventh centuries. This Mexican version displays the Apocalyptic Woman in Renaissance forms at their height. She stands with a quietness and restraint later forsaken for the surge of the baroque. Her pose is a subtle title of the head and a gently curving body. Her garments are not confused with details and their softness is in harmony with her oval-shaped face. The color scheme, a blue mantle with gold stars and trim, and a red robe enriched with gold embroidery, is said to never deviate. However, it is interesting to note that this summer I observed that many of the images of the Virgin sold outside of the basilica are very stylized and suggest the Mexican flag with the mantle of the Virgin appearing in a green, one of the colors of the Mexican flag. The patient cherub with bright colored wings who appears beneath the Virgin of Guadalupe also never deviates. This Virgin is the most popular and well know of all Mexican images, and her popularity has increased since the nineteenth century. As Patroness of Mexico and of the Americas she is besought by all to remedy all ills (Gifford, pp. 53-4).

CONCLUSION

We will conclude this brief discussion and comparison of the artistic representations of the Virgin of northern Spain with that of Mexico, by referring again to the Mother of God's own words according to Luke 1 48 "All generations shall call me blessed and with this image is my grace and power " Her words seem to be accurate, for generation after generation continues to be drawn to her loving image It is a powerful example of the role art plays in the lives of people throughout the world

OBJECTIVES

_____1. The student will read aloud and discuss with class the provided background information about the rise of Christianity as a guiding force in art.

_____2. The student will participate in making a class poster that compares and contrasts the artistic representation of the Virgin from Soria, Spain, with that of the Virgin of Mexico.

_____3. The student will participate in making a class poster that list how the elements and principles of art are used in the artistic rendering of the Virgin of Mexico.

_____4. The student will paint a faithful representation of the Virgin of Mexico and create his/her own negative space treatment. Next, the student will expand the theme by creating a second painting of the Virgin involved in an everyday activity commonly associated with a mother.

_____5. The student will write a short commentary after finishing his/her paintings discussing his/her work and including why he/she believes that the Virgin plays such a powerful role in the lives of the people of Mexico.

TO ACHIEVE THE OBJECTIVES OF THE LESSON

To achieve the objectives of the lesson, the class will create the following posters together to display and use in the classroom while they are working on the project:

_____1. A poster that compares and contrasts the two artistic images.

_____2. A poster that lists how the elements and principles are used to paint the Virgin of Guadalupe.

_____3. A poster that lists why the class feels that the Virgin of Guadalupe is so important in the lives of all people of Mexico.

MATERIALS

BACKGROUND: Immediately following the conquest, missionary priests instructed Mexico's already-skilled native craftsmen in the new Christian iconography and carefully supervised them . While the wealthy might afford paintings on canvas, the poorer classes had to be content with small images painted on wooden panel or crude canvases. Later, during the eighteenth century, paintings on copper sheets became popular, but because of the cost of the copper, only those of more substantial means could afford them. Late in the eighteenth century the metallurgical process of applying a thin coat of tin to a leaf of iron was perfected. These tin sheets provided the artist with an inexpensive and readily available painting surface. Paint adhered well to the tin, and under protective conditions it is as durable as copper and much lighter. The fact that tin was easily available made it the material often used in Mexican painting of the Virgin and is the reason that it will be used for this project (Giffords,pp. 2-3).

pencil
ruler
sketch paper
carbon transfer paper
acrylic paints
water container
assortment of paintbrushes
permanent black maker
Two pieces of tin 10" X 14"

STRATEGIES

Complete a painting of the Virgin of Guadalupe using figure 2. Focus on the class poster that lists how the elements of principles of art were used to paint the Virgin. Complete a sketch of the Virgin with your proposed treatment of the negative space. After a conference with the teacher, begin to paint.

To complete the accompanying "Work of The Mother" painting, submit your thumbnail sketches to your teacher, arrange a conference and after discussing your proposal with the teacher, begin to work.

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EVALUATION

The student evaluation will be based on the following areas:

_____1. The student will successfully paint a faithful representation of the Virgin of Guadalupe adhering to the image that hangs in the Basilica de Guadalupe.

_____2. The student will successfully treat the negative space around the Virgin of Guadalupe in a personal manner that successfully holds the composition together.

_____3. The student will successfully create an accompanying representation of the Virgin involved in some everyday activity commonly associated with a mother.

_____4. The student will successfully write and type a commentary to hang with his/her work.

_____5. The student will frame and hang his/her work in the student art show.

_____6. The student will critique his/her work applying the steps of art criticism: describe, analyze, interpret, and judge.

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PUPPET PLAY IDEAS

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The third year Spanish students will first work with the coloring book version of the story of the appearance of the Virgin of Guadalupe to Juan Diego to compare and contrast the use of el preterito and el imperfecto. Next, the students will convert the story into a puppet play that will be presented to the first year, second year and elementary gifted and talented classes in order to promote the study of Spanish.

A sample of the coloring book and the address of where it can be located are included along with ideas for some puppets.

Cuaderno para ILUMINAR

LA HISTORIA DE LAS APARICIONES DE LA SANTISIMA VIRGEN DE GUADALUPE.

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6.00
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Cuaderno para

ILUMINAR

LA HISTORIA DE LAS APARICIONES

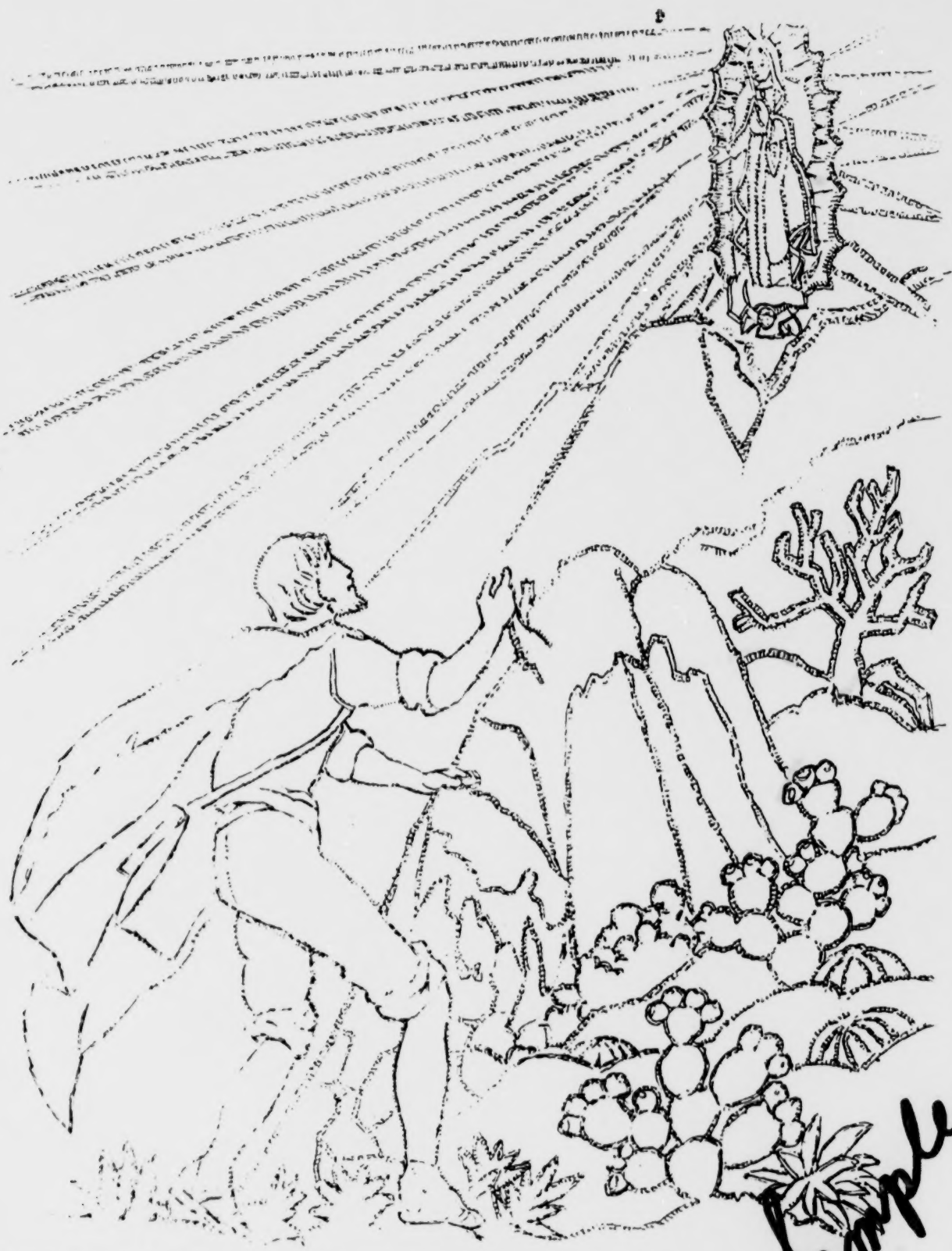
DE LA SANTISIMA VIRGEN DE GUADALUPE

OBRA NACIONAL DE LA BUENA PRENSA, A.C.
Orozco y Berra 180. Sta. María la Ribera.
Orizaba 37. Altos. Col. Roma.
Apartado M-2181. 06000 México, D.F.
Tels. 5-46-45-00 y 5-35-73-04

Sample

y que alguien lo llamaba desde arriba: "Juanito Juan Diequito".

6



El subió muy contento y se encontró con una Señora muy bonita.

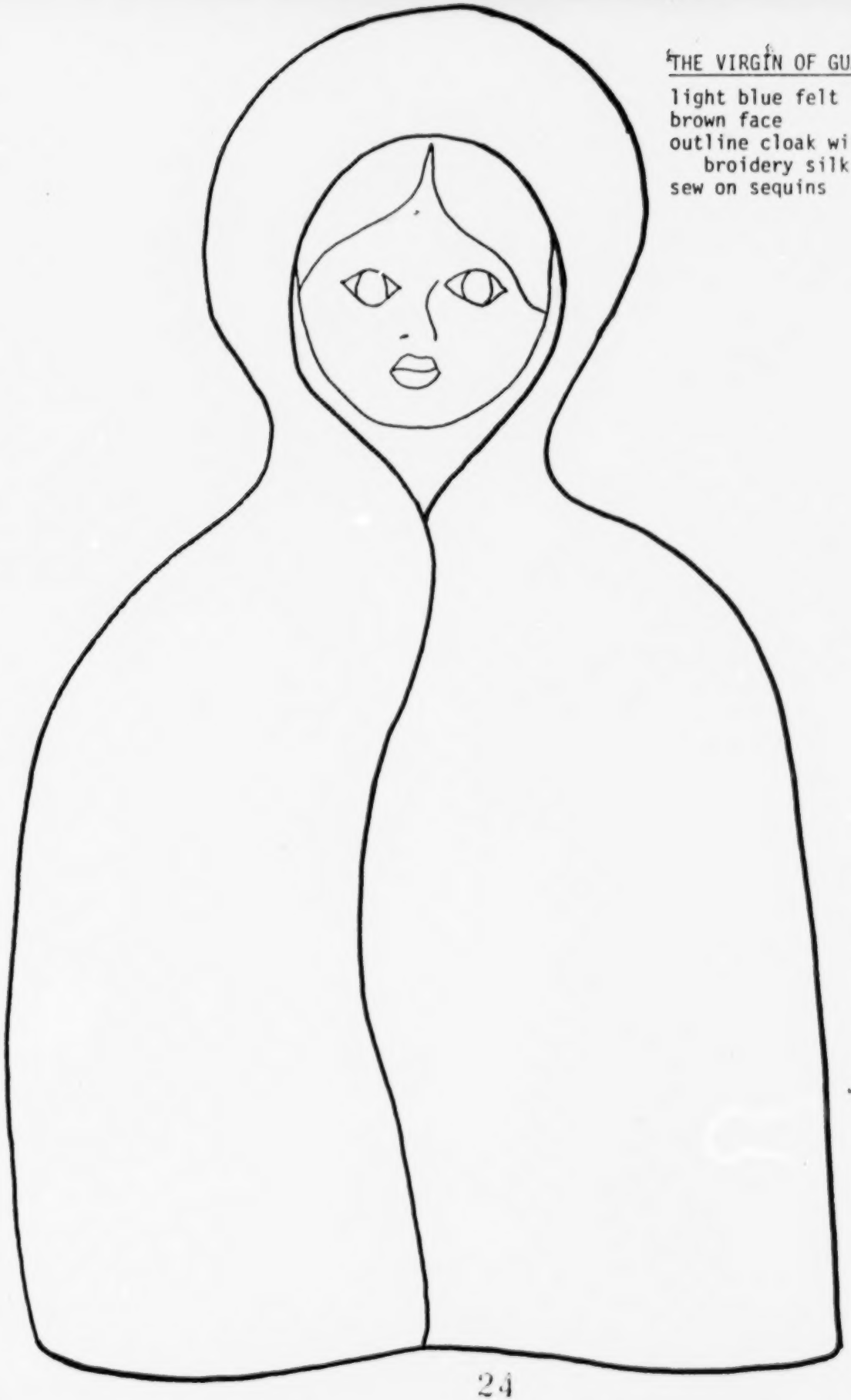
7

Sample

El vestido de la Señora brillaba como el sol; las rocas, como el arcoiris.

8

Sample

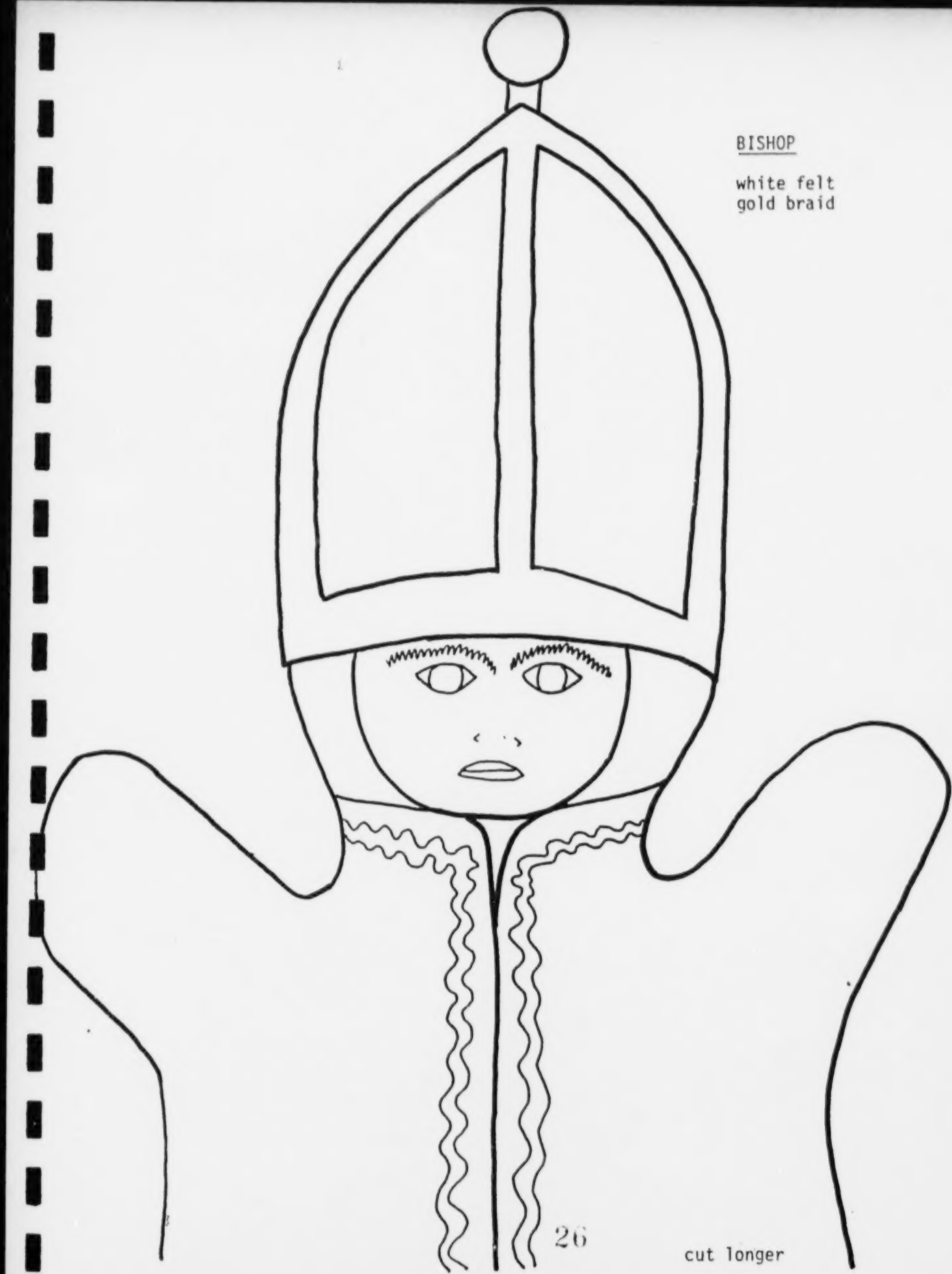


THE VIRGIN OF GUADALUPE

light blue felt
brown face
outline cloak with embroidery silk
sew on sequins

JUAN DIEGO

white felt
brown face
black wool hair



BISHOP

white felt
gold braid

cut longer

EXTRA THINGS

GORDITAS
(As told to me by a woman in Mexico)

450 grams of cornmeal
225 grams of shortening
225 grams of sugar
6 egg yolks beaten
a little flavoring of choice

Cream the sugar and the shortening, add the egg yolks, cornmeal and the flavoring. Add enough water, if necessary, to make a dough. Prepare like a pancake.

*We plan to serve these to celebrate the hanging of our show while we sing La Mananitas.

Las mañanitas

G D7 G G7 C
És-tas son las ma-ña-ni-tas que can-ta-ba el rey Da-vid, pe-ro
G D7 G D7
no e-ran tan bo-ni-tas co-mo las can-tan a-quí. Des-
D7 G D7 G G7
pier-ta, mi bien, des-pier-ta, mi-ra que ya a-ma-ne-ció; ya los
C G D7 G
pa-ja-ri-llos can-tan, la lu-na ya se me-tió.

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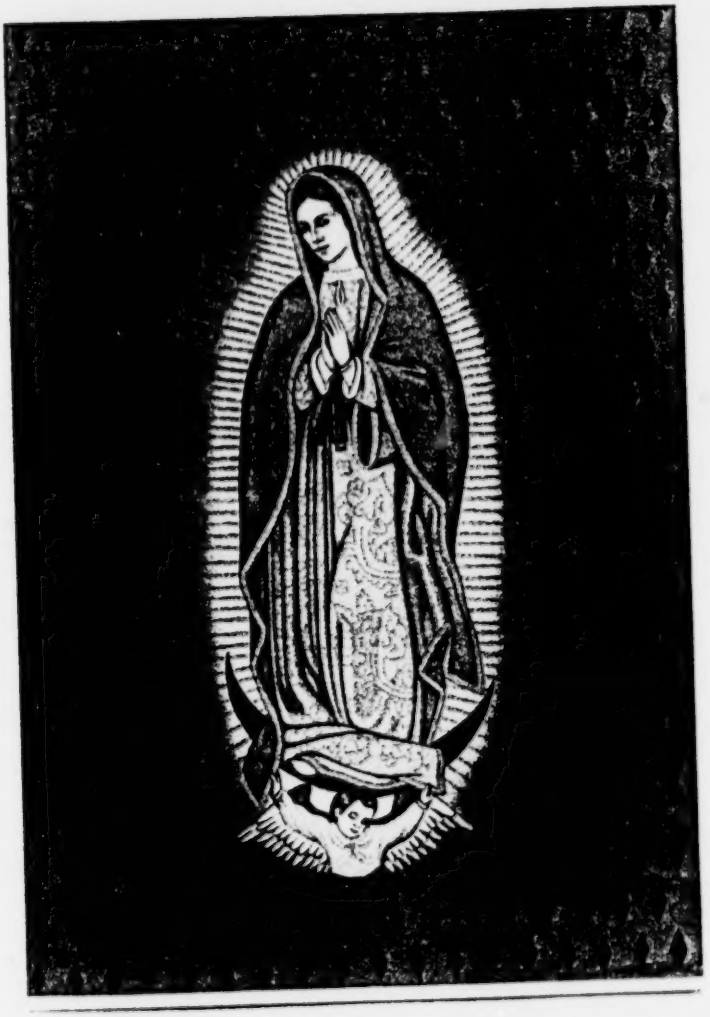
EXAMPLES OF NEGATIVE SPACE TREATMENT



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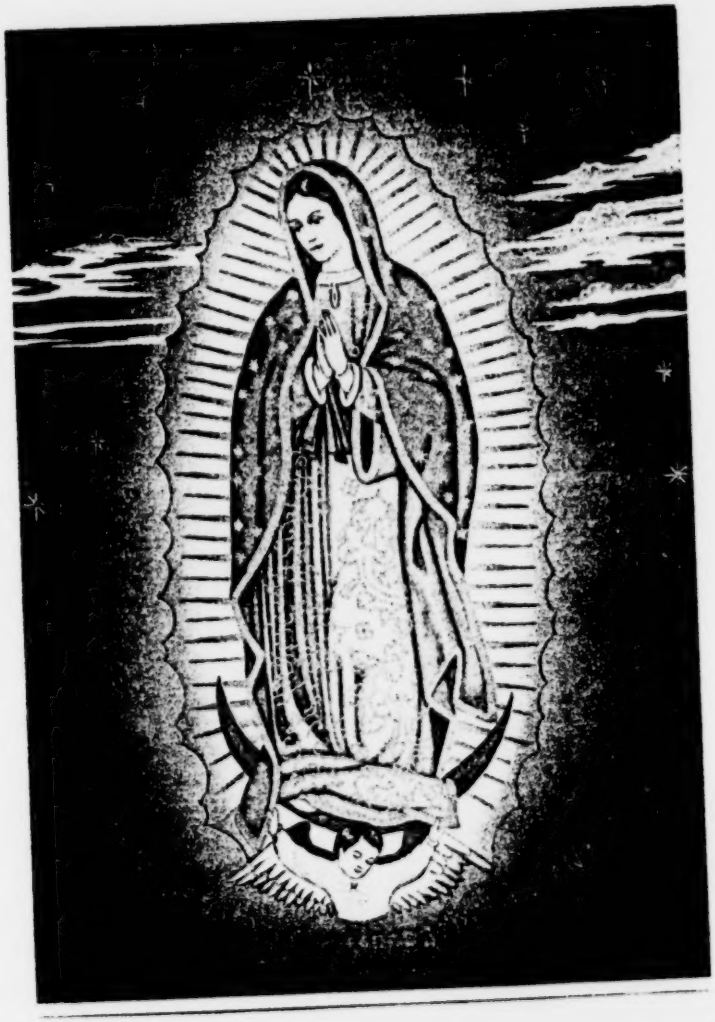

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